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DAYS
OF FIRST LOVE



CHATTERTON DIX

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Father Drury
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Catharines Day
1928.

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W. Hengeman. Pinxt.

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DAYS OF FIRST LOVE

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of this edition of "Days of First
Love." Each copy is numbered.

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DAYS OF FIRST LOVE

BY W. CHATTERTON DIX

**WITH INTRODUCTION BY
HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL VAUGHAN**

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INTRODUCTION

THESE beautiful and touching verses are calculated to bring before the minds of the readers that true and filial devotion to the Queen of Heaven, which is the characteristic of every sincere and devout Catholic.

A work having in view such an object cannot fail to bring a blessing upon those who have published it, and this blessing should extend to those who utilise it for the end for which it was written.

✠ HERBERT, CARDINAL VAUGHAN

Archbishop of Westminster

14th December 1900

TO ALL BEARING
THE NAME OF
MARY
IN HONOUR OF
THE NAME
WHICH IS ABOVE
EVERY NAME
THESE LINES ARE
DEDICATED

PREFACE

THE following lines by the late W. Chatterton Dix deal with some of the highest and deepest verities of the Christian Religion. The devout, gifted and saintly-minded Author treats these truths with historical accuracy, theological exactitude and poetic grace; whilst the tone and temper with which he alludes to, addresses and speaks of the Mother of God, are such as could only come from the head and heart of one who deeply loved and venerated our Blessed Lady. The Poem will be welcomed by all those who love and believe in her Divine Son.

C. P. F.

December 1900

DAYS OF FIRST LOVE

DAYS OF FIRST LOVE

In Ephesus, where men were wont of old,
With cries to greet Diana, goddess great,
I saw, in vision, her whose feet are placed
By Christian art upon the crescent moon,
With stars of Heaven for glory round her head,
Crowned, for her rank in virginal estate
With queenly crown, only less bright than His,
Who, King o'er all, has pleasure in her grace.
She more than goddess, yet not gross as that,
Material, yet supernatural,
In that, unlike all other matrons, she
In her great motherhood, was free from stain:

DAYS OF FIRST LOVE

Clear as the moon, for her no silver shrine
Was reared by hands impure with curious arts ;
Herself a Palace, Tower of Ivory,
Whose pureness mirrored back the grace of God ;
Herself the Flower of all Virginity,
Lily whose snowy petals know no spot ;
The sanctuary's Gate Ezekiel saw
Shut and by which no man may enter in
Because the Lord, the God of Israel,
By it hath entered in His majesty ;
Star of the Sea, for thus Saint Isidore
Interprets her sweet name of whom The Lord
Jesus was born, the very Light of Light,
Born of her substance, He the Uncreate.

DAYS OF FIRST LOVE

Bright Queen, across the sea
Of dread Immensity,
Let thy pure virgin beam
In all its radiance stream,

That haply it may win
Some child of shame and sin
To thy dear Lord and Son,
The Lamb, th' Atoning One.

For He and only He
Can set such wholly free,
Pardon the headlong fall,
And lure with love's sweet call.

DAYS OF FIRST LOVE

But thou, we know, canst plead

For all in sorest need.

What mother will not pray

For children gone astray?

And as the lucent star,

O'er land and sea afar,

Sends forth its silver rays,

Yet ever perfect stays,

So thy virginity

Shall ever perfect be,

Though for remotest earth

Light sprang from thee to Birth.

DAYS OF FIRST LOVE

What is this crowd in lowly worship bent ?
Christians these are, despised, misunderstood,
And hated for their faith in Him Who hung,
The Nazarene, upon the Tree of Scorn ;
These, followers of Him Who died in shame ;
A King, yet crucified between the thieves ;
A Prophet whom the prophets could not save ;
A Priest, of Whose dear Blood priests guilty stood :
These, daystars in the morning's early light,
First-fruits of grace, naught in the eyes of men
Who at the Man Christ Jesus, as he groaned
In thirst and last extreme upon His cross,
Thrust out the tongue, wagging their savage
heads,
Spat on that Face, which to the smiters given,
Still even turned to them in tenderness,

DAYS OF FIRST LOVE

And pled with silent look more dread than words.
These are thy saints, Church of the Living God ;
These are thy teachers, O inerrant world,
Who dare thee for the love of Him Who came
Seeking fair gems amidst the filth of sin,
Seeking, true Merchantman, for goodly pearls
To store as jewels in His crown at last :
Those precious stones which love should sharply
 cut,
Dug from the darksome depths of Adam's guilt.

DAYS OF FIRST LOVE

See, yonder kneels the Magdalene in tears,
She who had much forgiven, loving much ;
She who had come from wearying ways of sin
To tread the path of holy penitence ;
She who had passed from pleasing selfish men
To cloistered peace of heart with Him, Whose Feet,
Weary and sore, she washed with penance-tears,
The same which on the Cross, grown cold, she
kissed.

There kneels Veronica, whose piety
Mastered her womanly and tender fear,
As o'er the Via Dolorosa, Christ
Passed, like a lamb before its shearers dumb :
Unmindful of herself, as of the crowd,
She only saw the Holy Face bedewed
With Precious Blood, the Eyes, all blind with
streams

DAYS OF FIRST LOVE

Which poured life-giving, from those blessed Brows
Crown'd with the wreath of cruel, piercing thorns.
She saw but this ; and seeing, sprang to wipe
The Blood away, when, as the legend says,
Upon that handkerchief there stood impressed
The Bloody Countenance, with Eyes upturned,
The sorrow-stricken Face of Jesus Christ.

Ruddy it shone against the snowy white,
With anguish marr'd, yet full of grace sublime !
And they were there, who in their bodies bore
The dying marks, the Stigmata of Christ :
There, that the Sacred Body once again
Might come to touch them with its mystic power,
Quicken each pulse and touch each quivering
nerve

With all the Fulness of the Godhead's might.

DAYS OF FIRST LOVE

O awful gift of this great Sacrament !

O hidden power, veiled by the Hand of Love !

Dread oneness of the Master and the slave !

Blest union in the Marriage Feast of God !

DAYS OF FIRST LOVE

But now with measur'd step and solemn mien,
Vested in white as snowy as the locks
Which crown with silver sheen th' Apostle's brow,
Saint John ascends the Altar's sacred height,
There in the bloodless Rite, with eyes uplift
And hands upraised, to intercede for souls,
To plead the all-sufficient Sacrifice,
To feed his flock, and, with them, breaking bread,
Deal forth to each the Body of the Lord.
Yes, he was celebrant ; he who had leaned
On Jesùs' Breast to learn deep Mysteries :
He whose great words about the Sacrament
Breathed in his own Evangel, burn with love ;
He to whom Jesus, dying, gave for charge,
That holy Mother at whose breasts he hung.
Oh wondrous thought, that in this sacred Feast

DAYS OF FIRST LOVE

Back to that Mother, John could give her Son !
And then I heard the holy Creed, the shout
Of all the faithful as they made belief
In God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
And the great verities of Christ's dear Spouse ;
(For in my visions times were all confused
And the great Symbol rose on high, as if
No Pagan lurked to hunt the Christian soul ;
As if Nicæa's voice had spoken out
To vindicate the Majesty of Christ
Against the Arian, who taught that He,
Born of the Virgin Mary, was not God ;
Stripping the Christian Faith of Christ Himself.
Thus all our dreams are vexed and incomplete ;
Oh ! for that vision, perfect, face to face,
Which knows no harsh confusion, nothing warped,
The Vision Beatific, saints shall see !)

DAYS OF FIRST LOVE

When they confessed that God was born on
Earth,

Suddenly, Angels, where the Mother knelt,
Lit up the place with strange unearthly glow :
One on her pallid brow a bright crown placed,
One in her hand, a sceptre, sign of rule ;
While others gave her robes meet for a Queen.
Then said I, thus they honour her because
From her pure womb the Bridegroom deigned
to come.

And questioned I, is this sweet, maiden Queen
She who with bow'd head knelt a while ago ?
Is this the Mother with the sword-pierced heart ?
Yea ; it is she who smiles upon her Babe,
Who hears Him in the Temple judge the wise,
Who watches Him, her God, play with the boys

DAYS OF FIRST LOVE

About the streets of Nazareth, sees Him
In Joseph's shed, planing the rough wood's face,
Or feels His soft, fair cheek against her own,
Or hears Him call her Mother, calls Him son.
Then, when the saint of Love, the Eucharist
Had consecrated, she arose and stood,
Mother of Sorrows once more, mourning Him
Whose Flesh was pierced, e'en in her sight for me.
I saw her once again uncrowned. No more
The sceptre glittered in her hand, her robe
Of queenly splendour lay upon the ground.
But as she went to take the Mysteries,
I saw that Angels still kept watch around
The spot where her apparel lay, perhaps,
To guard from touch, even of saint, what Christ
Had given His Blessed Mother at the Feast.

DAYS OF FIRST LOVE

Thus it appeared that when Our Lady rose
To take the Holy Body of her Son,
All queenly robes vanished, and she went
In simple dignity of womanhood,
With face all sorrowful and reverent tread,
Yet with sweet grace of Virgin purity ;
The lowly Handmaid to her Lord and God,
The Mother of Fair Love to Love itself :
She, far above the others, went as they
To feed upon the Holy Mysteries.

DAYS OF FIRST LOVE

Ah ! I have thought, what if that stricken soul
Was so pierced through on Calvary's dreadful
height,

That there, beneath her dying Son, she died ;
That as she saw Him in her arms lie cold,
Her heart was broken, and her natural life
Was wrenched away, and that she moved about
Thenceforward in life supernatural,
The Life of Him Whose holy Flesh and Blood
By His own Hands in love to her were given,
And thus from time to time to be renewed,
Until He sent what looked to men like death ;
Sleep which he gave to His beloved, ere
Forth from the tomb in dark Gethsemane,
Where Blood still trickled round the olive's roots,
He, Lord of all the living and the dead,
Called her with Him in highest Heaven to reign.

DAYS OF FIRST LOVE

But if the inner grace were one to all,
Mary far more than all, bowed down in awe,
As in her hand was placed the Sacred Flesh
Which gave her still intenser union
Than that she had, when, in those nine long
months,
She bare within her Womb the Infinite :
Closer than when she clasped Him to her breast,
Or felt Him climb in play upon her knee
In all the freshness of His boyish love ;
And closer too, than when amidst the cries
Of fierce and maddened hate she watched him die,
Or when in still more awful, silent gloom,
She held Him in her arms, blood-stained and dead.

DAYS OF FIRST LOVE

What were her thoughts as she approached
her Son ?

Had she, in days gone past, prayed mother-like,
That He might evermore before her stand
To crown her heart with sure, abiding joy ?
But long ago she had the lesson learnt,
Even the knowledge of Him Who had been
So long time with her, yet not fully known.
But now, how was this wish of her's fulfilled ?
Ever He stands before her widow'd heart,
Ever His hands, outstretched, embrace her still
As in this Sacrament of love He waits
To bless her with His Body and His Blood.
Had she revealed to her the awful time
When she should stand upon the King's right Hand,
Clad in gold vesture and fair needlework ?

DAYS OF FIRST LOVE

Did she remember in her highest prayer
Virgins that were her fellows and the bands
Of those whom lustful heathens lured to shame?
Or looking down the vista of the years
Unborn, unchronicled, did she descry
The troops of holy maids, fair brides of Christ
Who own no other love than His and die
With soul and body virginal for Him?
Or, haply, all the goodly matrons she,
Recalling her pure motherhood, beheld;
Those who in holy wedlock's mystic tie
Should sons and daughters bear as living stones
To grace the temple of the Lord Most High.
And of Saint Joseph, foster-father dear,
Who with true chivalry had steadfast stood,
She surely had sweet thoughts; he who had watched

DAYS OF FIRST LOVE

Untroubled by her side, full chivalrous
Because, when men provoked, his silent love
In all its hidden springs remained unmoved :
Loyal, unswayed by passion's fever force,
Strong in its faith, strong in the strength of trust.
Then, too, Our Lady thought of all those pure
And deeply loving husbands who are wronged,
Not by a deed of shame, but by distrust,
Cold love, hard thoughts, suspicions based on
 dreams,
And all those idle phantasies of heart
Which women love to conjure up like ghosts
To mar their sunlight hours and haunt their sleep.
Then, too, the lowly Mother prayed for those
Who bare the name of woman to degrade
To hideous wreck, all graces womanly.

DAYS OF FIRST LOVE

Then, too, she thought of those only less base,
Who mince through life, languid and purposeless,
Contemptuous, mindful only they of self,
Consuming time with well-bred vanities,
Babbling sweet nothings, or, with venom-tongue,
Setting their little world on fire with hell :
Those who disdain all means of grace and take
To woman's rights and high philosophy ;
Women unwomanly, who in the world
Play men's parts badly ; trick'd in stage attire
That ill becomes them in that coloured glare
Which shows them off, but not irradiates ;
Transient day-glitter, not life's aureole,
The world's false beams, not halo of the saint.

DAYS OF FIRST LOVE

And what of thee, thou who thus judgest all ?
Had she no thoughts of thy unfaithfulness,
Thy coldness, thy forgetfulness, thy falls,
And all thy poor, unworthy thoughts of her ?

DAYS OF FIRST LOVE

Forgive, great Mother, all the years
Wherein I passed thee by unknown :
Forgive the weak, unworthy fears
Of faithlessness to Jesùs' throne.

I know Him better now and thee,
I know Him and I love thee more
Than in those days, not shadow-free,
When still I stood outside the door :

Outside the door of full content,
When only through the opened gate,
I fancied what that fulness meant
Which in God's time should satiate.

DAYS OF FIRST LOVE

But now I know thee ; yet, how faint

My love and my devotion seem :

As if soft living framed the saint,

And feeble love won Christ's esteem.

Men say that loving thee, I dim

The glory of thy Son Divine,

But otherwise I learn of Him,

And call thee His, and find thee mine.

His—for what mother who could own

As thou, a Son and Saviour dear ?

Mine—for in Him still fairer grown,

I find thee, ever, ever near.

AVE MARIA
GRATIA PLENA DOMINUS TECUM
BENEDICTA TU IN MULIERIBUS
ET BENEDICTUS FRUCTUS VENTRIS TUI
JESUS
SANCTA MARIA MATER DEI
ORA PRO NOBIS PECCATORIBUS
NUNC ET IN HORA MORTIS NOSTRÆ
AMEN

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